

into account the positive signs we see all around. It is a positive sign when we write about how blue-collar employment has surged; positive signs about how low-income workers experienced the highest wage growth in a decade; positive signs when we report how new business startups are climbing and how U.S. manufacturers had their best year since 1997; and positive signs as you discuss how the economy grew almost 50 percent faster in 2018 than as President Obama's economists predicted when they predicted slow growth would be the new normal.

All of these subjects are far more important than what has thus far, in most all respects, been an uneventful filing season. Compare this year's tax bottom line with last year's tax bottom line to decide whether you got a tax decrease or a tax increase, not the size of your refund.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROPOSED RULES CHANGE

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, 2 years ago, I came to this floor of the Senate to talk about the rules process and nominations in particular because, even 2 years ago, we were experiencing the beginning of what I saw to be a trend.

When elected to office, every President has about 1,200 nominations that have to come through the Senate for what is called advice and consent. Those individuals go through background checks at the White House, they go through interviews through the White House, and they go through the extensive review of references. Then they are recommended to the respective committees here, where they again go through background checks, have conversations, interviews, public hearings, questions for the record after the hearings are over, and go through any followup from any individual American who wants to give input whether that input be from outside groups here or from anywhere else in the country. Then they come to the floor of the Senate.

In the past, those individuals moved through quickly because there were 1,200 of them, but the minority has always had the right to have one last, little slowdown when they have gotten to the floor. They can make what is called a cloture vote request. The minority—any individual—could always make a request for a cloture vote to say: I know they have gone through all of these extensive checks, that they have already passed the committee, that they have gone through all of the process, but at the end, I want an additional 30 hours of debate on these peo-

ple. Yet it is not just 30 hours of debate; it is actually what is called a full intervening day. After that, there is an additional 30 hours of debate for that person.

That has been done in the past but very rarely in the first 2 years of a Presidency because there are so many nominations that have to go through the process. If we go back to President Clinton, there were eight of those requests. For President Bush, there were four of those. For President Obama, there were 12 of those. For President Trump, there have been 128 of those.

Two years ago, I saw the trend of where this was heading. This was a new structure for the beginning of a Presidency. I was concerned at that time, but I have an even greater concern now. It is the trend of where we are headed as a Senate. Is this going to be the new normal? This used to be what was normal: Occasional nominees would come through if they were very controversial. Yet most of these nominees were not really all that controversial. In fact, 48 percent of those nominees who had the additional cloture time then got more than 60 votes. In fact, 37 percent of them got more than 70 votes. These were not controversial individuals coming through; it was just an intentional slowing down of the process.

I have heard folks say: There are so many of these judges who are coming through at the district court level that they become very controversial.

Quite frankly, every single judge who comes through has to be approved by the two Senators from that State through what is called the blue-slip process. This is for all of those district court judges. It is a process that has been honored by previous administrations and by this administration. This Senate has honored those same blue slips for all of the district court judges. If the judges are from a Democratic State, both of those Democratic Senators have to approve of them before they come. If the judges are from a State that has one Democrat and one Republican, it has to be split. If there are two Republicans, they both have to agree to it. This is for all of the district court judges. Yet they are still being slowed down. They have gone through the background checks, and they have been approved by their home State Senators regardless of party; yet they are slowed down.

So whether they are executive nominees or whether they are judicial nominees, these 128 individuals being slowed down has created a new slowdown in the Senate.

Two years ago, I made a proposal to go back to something that Harry Reid proposed and was passed by this Senate in 2013, which was long before I was here. It was a 2-year agreement to just say: Here is how we are going to deal with what is called postcloture debate time. If there is a controversial nominee, here is how we will handle it.

I went to my colleagues and said: Let's revive that rule. Instead of mak-

ing it for 2 years, which was the Harry Reid rule, let's just make it from here on out. I made that proposal in the last Senate. We took that to the Rules Committee. It passed the Rules Committee, but it could not pass on this floor.

I thought it was eminently kind and bipartisan to say that I would go back and grab Harry Reid's rule and that if it was good for the Democrats when they were in the leadership, it should be good for everybody regardless of whether it is the Republicans or the Democrats. It did not pass.

I have once again come back and made a proposal to say let's fix this and to not just fix this for now but to fix this from here on out. Whether there will be a Democratic President or a Republican President in the future, let's have a simple rule: If we get to a nominee who has gone through the background checks of the White House, has gone through the committee and passed the committee, and has gone through additional questions for the record—all of that—if people still want additional time, they can still request the intervening day, but then instead of 30 hours after that full day, it would be just 2 hours of additional time.

Quite frankly, during most of the time that we have had the 30 hours of debate, there hasn't really been debate on the floor for 30 hours; there has been debate on the floor for, say, 15 or 20 minutes. For the rest of the time, the floor has sat empty or we have debated other things other than the nominee.

So we would set aside 2 additional hours. We would do this for district court judges, and we would do this for most of the nominees for the executive branch, but we would still hold that 30 hours for things like nominees for the circuit court, the Supreme Court, and those at the Cabinet level. For those types of positions, sure, keep the 30 hours, but for the other 1,000-plus nominees who are to be the Deputy Secretaries or assistants of whatever it may be, allow them to go through the normal process and not slow it down.

The Chief Counsel for the IRS has not been confirmed. He went through the last Congress, but he didn't get there. He passed 25 to 2 out of committee. He passed 26 to 2 out of committee this time; yet there is a requirement of 30 additional hours of debate on the floor. He will probably pass overwhelmingly, but it is just a tactic to slow down this floor.

We have a lot of business to do. Let's make a rule that is fair, and let's make it work for everyone. My concern is, long-term for the Senate, this will be the new trend, and the next time there is a Democratic President, this is what Republicans will do to Democratic Presidents, and this will be the new way that we operate.

This isn't helpful for any President; this isn't helpful for the Senate; and this is something we need to fix.

We have 2 years of muscle memory on this now—of doing it over and over

and over. I don't think this gets better because I think the political pressure will be there just to keep doing this and slowing things down for everybody.

So we put a rule out there. It has gone through the Rules Committee. I have encouraged my Democratic colleagues to join in with this because there will be a Democratic President someday in the future, and they will not want this coming back at them and will say this is unfair, and I will agree. But it will happen, so let's fix it now. Let's resolve this in this Senate in this time from here on out—not a short-term rule but long-term, permanent—to take us back to this being the norm, when we could work better together.

I love hearing everyone say that we should be more bipartisan as a body. I would love to get this body working again. That is this proposal. This proposal is not a partisan proposal. It is not trying to get leverage on anybody. It is trying to get this body back to working again, and I hope in the weeks ahead, when this rule actually comes to the floor of the Senate, we can get overwhelming bipartisan support for it so that we can get back to working together.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

NOMINATION OF ANDREW R. WHEELER

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about a vote that we will be having in just a few minutes on the process of moving Andrew Wheeler forward as the EPA Administrator.

This is not a time for talk; it is not time for theoretical debates. This is certainly not the time for an EPA Administrator who, during his time at the EPA, has ignored climate scientists, rolled back climate regulations, and taken action that will lead to more carbon pollution.

Instead, this is a time for bold, decisive action. We need to act today because life on our planet depends on it. The fate of our Nation depends on it. Our children's and grandchildren's futures depend on it.

For those reasons, I cannot support Andrew Wheeler for the critical position of EPA Administrator.

Climate change is real. In fact, it is more than real. It is an existential crisis, and it is already having real impact on Michigan families and Michigan's economy.

Some call it global warming. Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist from Texas Tech, has a better term. She call calls it "global weirding." Ask anybody in Michigan. Things have been weird.

Our lakes are heating up. In fact, Lake Superior is getting about 2 degrees warmer each decade. That could make the lake a happy home for invasive species, like sea lamprey.

As the waters warm, these parasites grow and kill off more trout and salmon and other fish that are key to the Great Lakes' \$8 billion recreational

fishing industry. It is believed that warmer temperatures contributed to algal blooms on the lake last summer.

Other changes we are seeing are life-threatening.

Thanks to the polar vortex in January, Michigan experienced temperatures colder than Antarctica. Scientists believe that climate change has caused the jet stream to become wobbly—that is a technical term, "wobbly"—pushing dangerously frigid air south.

Folks say: Well, how can it be global warming when we see the polar vortex? It is about what is happening to destabilize the atmosphere and the planet and the changes that are occurring.

Last weekend, a bomb cyclone hit my State, leaving tens of thousands of Michigan residents without power.

We are having to come up with new terms. I had never heard of a bomb cyclone—60-mile-an-hour winds, ripping up homes and farms and roadways.

The intensity of what is happening is incredible. The travel was so treacherous in Otsego County that all roads were closed—all of the roads were closed. Even drivers on Interstate 75 were getting stuck in drifts. That is our major highway.

We can't link any specific storm to climate change. However, we do know that overall climate change is making storms more intense. They are longer. They are more intense. They are happening more frequently with more intensity.

Last summer in Houghton County, more than 5½ inches of rain fell in 6 hours. It caused at least \$100 million in damage to infrastructure, and a 12-year-old boy died when the basement of his home collapsed.

Our climate is changing, but you don't have to take my word for it. Just ask insurance company executives. Their companies paid out a record \$135 billion—billion dollars—from natural disasters in 2017 alone. That is almost three times as much as the historic annual average, and their projections show it getting worse.

We need to take action on climate change. While it is not widely recognized, I want to speak about something positive that we have done, and that was last year's farm bill.

As you know, the farm bill passed the Senate with a vote of 87 to 13—the most votes in history. While the bill was historic for a number of reasons, one of those is that it includes the most ambitious Federal climate-smart agricultural and forestry policies to date, working with farmers and ranchers as partners.

It helps farmers implement climate-smart policies by revamping USDA conservation programs to prioritize investments in soil carbon sequestration, incentivizing the planting of cover crops, and expanding USDA support for farmer participation in carbon markets.

It also invests in the Rural Energy for America Program, which helps

farmers and rural small businesses install renewable energy systems and creates a joint USDA-Department of Energy education grant program to drive carbon capture projects across rural America.

We must also protect forests and farmland, which serve as vital carbon sinks that hold carbon rather than releasing it and making the destabilization even worse.

The farm bill amends the popular Healthy Forests Reserve Program to prioritize carbon sequestration practices programs and discourage the development of forestland. It authorizes new programs to restore national forest landscapes, protect carbon-rich, old-growth trees, and prevent uncharacteristic wildfires and their emissions. It establishes a landmark soil health demonstration trial to keep carbon in the ground and promote healthy and productive farmland.

I am proud of what we did. It was done with the partnership of farmers and ranchers, and I have to say that our farmers understand the importance of protecting our land—their land—air, and water, I think, as much as, if not more than anyone else. No one's business is more impacted by severe and erratic weather than our farmers. They are caught right in the middle of it, and I appreciate their working with us to be part of the solution.

I am also working with my colleagues on policies to ensure that the United States, not China, is the global leader on advanced transportation technologies like electric and hydrogen vehicles.

Meanwhile, Andrew Wheeler and the Trump administration are upending fuel economy and carbon regulations in a way that hurts the auto industry, consumers, and our environment. We need to invest more in renewable energy and the research that is making it more affordable all the time.

Electric utilities in Michigan have committed to dramatically increase renewable electricity, reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent, and stop burning coal.

Meanwhile, Andrew Wheeler and the Trump administration have rolled back the historic Clean Power Plan.

I am proud of the fact that Michigan utilities are moving forward anyway because they know it is the right thing and they know what is at stake. But this administration—Andrew Wheeler—has rolled back the historic Clean Power Plan, the Nation's first regulation of greenhouse gases from the power sector.

We need to be laser-focused on climate change and the existential threat it represents. Meanwhile, Andrew Wheeler and the Trump administration are doing their best to pretend that climate change is no big deal. That is even as the Pentagon recently concluded that two-thirds of critical military installations are threatened—two-thirds of critical military installations are threatened—by climate change.